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ABSTRACT

Academic advisement models in higher education have traditionally focused on the needs of the undergraduate student population. The purpose of this paper is to provide a model for graduate student advisement clarifying the role of the graduate student advisor within a developmental context that meets the needs of adult students. The Mentoring-Empowered Model for Graduate Student Advisement, based upon the psychosocial needs of adult learners is presented. The model addresses graduate students in the context of communication that focuses upon psychological and developmental needs inherent in adult graduate students. It is based on concepts of graduate student advisement, the knowledge base on mentoring in education, and Erikson's stages of human development. The model provides graduate advisors with six characteristics essential to a developmental context for graduate student advisement (communication, trust, openness, acceptance, growth, nurture) and five behavior-specific role functions (sponsor and socializer, teacher, counselor, encourager, and role model). Implementation examples designed to facilitate communication between advisors and advisees are provided. A chart depicting the Mentoring-Empowered Model is appended. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/LL)

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THE MENTORING-EMPOWERED MODEL: FACILITATING COMMUNICATION IN GRADUATE ADVISEMENT

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Abstract

Academic advisement models have traditionally focused upon the needs of undergraduate students. The Mentoring-Empowered Model for graduate student advisement addresses graduate student advisement in a context of communication that focuses upon the psychosocial and developmental needs inherent to adult graduate students. The model is based upon concepts of graduate advisement, the knowledge base on mentoring in education, and Erikson's stages of human development. The Mentoring-Empowered Model provides graduate advisors with six characteristics essential to a developmental context for graduate student advisement and five behavior-specific role functions. Implementation examples designed to facilitate communication between advisors and advisees are provided.

There are several components that make graduate advisor-advisee communication a unique challenge. For example, the nature of graduate education, especially on the doctoral level, necessitates that advisors and advisees develop closer working relationships than those of undergraduates and their advisors. To compound the element of challenge, graduate advisement is often delivered by faculty advisors who have had little or no preparation for advising and are often assigned advisement responsibilities in addition to other professorial duties. Finally, graduate students are adults who bring to the communication process the challenges of combining graduate study with the stresses and responsibilities of adult life.

As a result, advising graduate students has been a balancing act that, in some situations, involves much trial and error on the part of professors and students. Many graduate students are successful, experienced adults who are more accustomed to giving advice than to receiving it. Adult students are more self-directed than traditional undergraduates, often viewing graduate study as one step in the process of achieving defined goals. Graduate advisors

and their advisees may be understandably unsure of the advisors' expected roles in advising these students. What does an independent adult student really need in the way of advising?

The purpose of this paper is to provide a model for graduate student advisement that clarifies the roles of the graduate student advisor within a developmental context that meets the needs of adult students. The model is based upon the psychosocial needs of adult learners and is presented as a comprehensive approach to the conceptualization of graduate student advisement. Although applications of the model will differ when interpreted to fit individual programs and levels of study, the need for developmental direction upon which it is based is fundamental.

Graduate level advisement needs will vary for many reasons, among them the course of study undertaken and the time of life or point on the career ladder in which students enter a graduate program. For example, doctoral students' needs for research direction will differ in scope and intensity from needs of masters students. In like manner, students progressing directly into graduate schools from baccalaureate degree programs will need different kinds of career-related direction than graduate students who are returning to campus after a period of time has elapsed with a career path already chosen.

Regardless of the level or type of graduate program chosen and whether or not students have been away from college or university classrooms for awhile, graduate students have different needs and priorities than undergraduates. Students pursuing an undergraduate degree are quite consistent in their advisement needs as they

complete the educational programs necessary for beginning professional careers. Just as the structure and content of graduate programs are more varied than those of undergraduate programs (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992) the needs and priorities of the students entering graduate programs reflect the diversity of the paths taken as adults.

Graduate Student Identity

Academic advisement in higher education has traditionally focused upon the needs of the undergraduate student population. The resulting advisement systems have been primarily developmental in nature. Ender, Winston and Miller (1982) characterized developmental advising as an ongoing relationship between advisor and student that encourages self-reflection upon and analysis of students' academic, career and personal goals. Advisors function as caring role models who help their students to integrate school, community, and personal resources.

As students progress through the undergraduate years, advisement needs gradually evolve, commensurate with their growing confidence and ability to become self-directed. The need for developmental advisement remains, but the scope and nature of such advisement evolves as students mature. Once students complete undergraduate studies and are ready for the challenges of graduate study, developmental advisory needs take on new dimensions.

For example, the goals of undergraduate academic advisement are to help students: (1) clarify values and goals; strive for self-understanding, (2) monitor and evaluate progress, (3) integrate

resources with needs, (4) fit program to interest and abilities, (5) explore career options, and (6) understand the nature and purpose of higher education (Crockett, 1984). Assistance with the latter item is no longer relevant for graduate students. Although the other areas may still be applicable, they must be interpreted in ways that fit the graduate student identity.

Whether students who choose to pursue graduate studies do so immediately or postpone advanced study for a while, once they enter adulthood, their needs change. Adult learners exercise choice in who or what will socialize them (Brim & Wheeler, 1966) and in what ways this will be done. Career goals become more focused. More autonomy and self-responsibility for learning is possible. Advisors need to take this new status into account when advising graduate students.

By the time graduate students enter master's, professional school, or doctoral degree programs, they have progressed beyond the concerns and needs of late adolescence into the sixth and seventh stages of Erikson's (1959) eight psychosocial stages of human development. In the sixth stage, the intimacy crisis, a person must conquer the fear of identity loss in order to experience mutual sharing. Not to do so leads to isolation. Therefore, it is important for advisors to establish an interpersonal climate of acceptance and openness when advising graduate students. Graduate students put their educational fate in their advisors' hands: no one person has greater potential to make an impact on a student's overall graduate school experience. Any resulting fear of potential intimidation must be alleviated to allow for direct, straightforward

communication. The advisor, as the partner with the most power in the relationship, must take the initiative to demonstrate acceptance and openness so that a trust-based relationship can develop.

In Erikson's seventh stage of development, the stage of generativity, a person seeks to make a meaningful contribution to society. If this is not accomplished, a sense of restlessness and stagnation results. A prudent advisor will be aware of this need for growth. Rather than presenting them as hurdles to be cleared, courses and assignments can be discussed from the perspective of their usefulness in accomplishing personal goals. Graduate study assists in an individual's expansion of knowledge, helping to facilitate the meaningful contributions desired. Students on the graduate level cannot seek refuge in the passive recipient-of-knowledge stance that may have provided a safe harbor on the undergraduate level.

The adult need for generativity and reciprocity in relationships must be kept in mind by both parties as graduate students establish relationships with the professors who will guide their educational paths. Becoming actively involved in their own graduate education is appropriate and necessary for graduate students. These students need to be reassured by role models and by those in positions of authority that shared initiative is important in plotting and pursuing a course of graduate study.

Importance of the Advisor

For graduate students, advisors are the most readily accessible professional role models. They assume central importance in the

guidance of graduate students. The importance of this relationship has been supported in many studies. In a study by Polkosnik and Winston (1983), 78% of the graduate students surveyed indicated that a close, personal relationship with an advisor was important. In a 1980 study by Goplerud, the high stress levels frequently found among graduate students were mediated or lessened in direct proportion to the frequency of student's contacts with faculty members. The greater the social distance between professors and students, the less satisfaction students report with their education (Bowen & Kilmann, 1976). The quality of interpersonal relationships between professors and students is so important that it has even been found to be a better predictor of success in a doctoral program than a student's GRE score and undergraduate grade point average (Sorenson & Kagan, 1967).

It is essential that advisors take the initiative to establish sound interpersonal communication grounded on trust, openness, and mutual willingness to grow (Barger & Mayo-Chamberlin, 1983). The nature of the resulting relationship between graduate advisor and advisee is as different from most undergraduate advisement relationships as graduate study is from undergraduate work. While still appropriately developmental, the relationship must respect the adult status of the advisee and be choice-directed, reflecting the professional and personal needs common to adult development.

Winston, Miller, Ender, and Grites (1984) provide five functions essential to the graduate advisor role: (1) being a reliable information source, (2) acting as a departmental socializer, (3) acting as an occupational socializer, (4) serving as

a role model, and (5) being an advocate for the advisee. These functions provide a concise minimum standard for graduate advisement.

Additional characteristics are also essential for graduate advisors desiring to make a significant, positive impact on students (Winston, Miller, Ender, & Grites, 1984). An advisor must be accessible and approachable, must be consistent in maintaining contact with advisees, and must establish pleasant relationships with advisees in and out of the classroom. These suggestions provide valuable suggestions for enacting the advisor role in a manner that meets graduate students' needs.

The Mentoring-Empowered Model

The role functions of the advisor and the preferred context for their enactment are expressed in the Mentoring-Empowered Model of Graduate Advisement (see figure 1). The large outer circle

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Insert figure 1 about here

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represents the context for Mentoring-Empowered graduate advisement. Within the large circle are the key characteristics associated with establishing a context for mentoring. These descriptors; trust, communication, openness, acceptance, and growth; comprise the developmental context into which the role functions of Mentoring-Empowered advisement are placed.

The role functions associated with mentoring appear in the smaller circles found within the circumference of the large circle.

These role functions are: role model, counselor, teacher, encourager, and sponsor/socializer. As shown in the model, they interconnect with each other and exist within the pre-established developmental context for Mentoring-Empowered graduate advisement represented by the large circle.

In the middle of the large circle representing the Mentoring-Empowered context for advisement and central to the ring of smaller circles containing the Mentoring-Empowered role functions is the mentor characteristic of nurturer. Nurturing is the foundation of the context in which Mentoring-Empowered graduate advisement takes place. It is the component that connects all other components of the model. The concept of advisor as nurturer is of central importance because it captures the fundamental nature of the mentoring process expressed in the Mentoring-Empowered Model for Graduate Advisement.

A Context of Mentoring-Empowered Graduate Student Advisement

Anderson and Shannon (1988) approach the concept of mentoring from a perspective that serves to further clarify the advisor's role functions. Mentoring is an intentional, insightful, supportive, process "in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, nurtures, befriends, teaches, sponsors, encourages, and counsels a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development" (Anderson & Shannon, 1988, p. 39).

It is also important to the nurturing nature of this relationship that the mentor be willing to "lead incrementally over

time" (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). Challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities need to be expanded as students' capabilities expand. Nurturing advisors/mentors must be sensitive to the transitory, developmental nature of graduate study in order to respond to student needs.

It is possible that agreeing upon a mutually acceptable implementation of the nurturing component of mentoring may be easier in some cases than in others. Some graduate students or their advisors may not want to establish a personal relationship that moves beyond a formal association, preferring to limit interaction to the realm of professional development. This choice must be respected. However, Anderson and Shannon's concept of mentoring does give the option of promoting the mentee's professional and/or personal development.

Even if there is insufficient time or interest on the part of the advisor or the advisee for maintaining the close mentor-protege bonds of traditional mentoring, advisors can still engage in mentoring behaviors. Just as individuals who are not parents can engage in parenting behaviors, individuals can implement mentoring behaviors without being mentors in the traditional sense.

The specific components that comprise the context for mentoring, as expressed in the model for Mentoring-Empowered graduate advisement, are: accepting and relating to each other; establishing good communication; and founding a relationship on trust, openness, acceptance and mutual willingness to grow (Barger & Mayo-Chamberlin, 1983; Anderson & Shannon, 1988). As indicated earlier, a context comprised of these characteristics is crucial for

nurturing the collective graduate student identity. It is also essential for facilitating the psychosocial development of the adult student.

Role Functions of Mentoring-Empowered Graduate Student Advisement

Cusanovich and Gillilard (1991) emphasize the importance of the mentoring context, stating that the role of the mentor is essential to graduate education. Graduate advisors take on many roles in an effort to meet the needs of their adult students. The Mentoring-Empowered Model focuses on graduate advisor roles important to the mentoring process: role model, counselor, teacher, encourager, and sponsor/socializer.

Mentors must be role models for their students in order to carry out role functions effectively. This means they must be competent enough and secure enough to open their professional activities up to scrutiny by their mentees. Advisors become the ideal by which advisees evaluate their own progress and accomplishments. Barger and Mayo-Chamberlin (1983) state that this process of comparison provides mentees with a sense of how they measure up to an experienced professional.

Counseling is another role function of the model. Similar to the contextual characteristic of nurturing in its potential for highly personal interpretation, counseling is the role function that may cause some advisors to hesitate. Counseling behaviors in this model are carefully delineated and include listening, probing for or clarifying information, and traditional academic advising. All of the counseling behaviors are familiar ones, traditionally ascribed

to advisors at all levels. Counseling, as defined here, may be comfortably applied in a professional interpersonal relationship.

The teaching role is perhaps the most familiar to advisors in the professoriate. Specific teaching behaviors attributed to those in advisor roles are informing, confirming, prescribing and questioning. While these behaviors are commonplace in the classroom setting, they must also carry over into the advisor-advisee relationship. Through enacting the teaching role one-on-one, advisors can be the reliable source of information (Winston, Miller, Ender, & Grites, 1984) that the advisor role traditionally requires.

Encouraging also comes naturally to those accustomed to the role of teacher or advisor. Encouraging in this instance means to affirm, inspire and challenge. An extension of sound teaching practice, these activities describe high quality teacher-student interaction at any level, including graduate school.

The final component of the mentoring definition is that of sponsor/socializer. This coincides with Winston's advisor role of departmental and occupational sponsor. In this usage sponsoring refers to supporting the student, protecting the student when necessary, and promoting the student's interests in the daily operations of the academic unit. Advisors in the sponsor role represent students' interests when students may not be in a position to do so personally. They may, for instance, nominate their advisees for scholarships and assistantships or for membership in a professional organization.

The main difference between the sponsor and socializer functions is that advisors enact the socializer role alongside

students rather than in their absence. Socialization in this usage refers to assisting students with their integration into the culture of the school and the college or university. This may take many forms. For example, advisors may choose to arrange meetings for students with the same major or similar research interests, encourage participation in student groups, introduce their students to colleagues, collaborate on a professional project, or attend a professional conference together.

Implementation of the Mentoring-Empowered Model

The first step in the integration of the model's theory with practice is the application of the Mentoring-Empowered Model in graduate units. For this to take place, advisors need to become familiar with the Mentoring-Empowered Model and consciously base advising interactions on the tenants of the model. The following suggestions for the model's application are theoretically based, as is the model, on the works of Anderson and Shannon (1988), Bargar and Mayo-Chamberlin (1983), Crockett (1984), Ender, Winston, and Miller (1982), Erikson (1959), Winston, Miller, Ender, and Grites (1984), and Winston and Polkosnik (1984).

If you are an advisor, application of the Mentoring-Empowered Model begins when a graduate student is assigned to you for advising. Immediately take the initiative in establishing a relationship with the advisee that is conducive to open communication. Invite him or her to your office for an informal visit and a welcome. Ask about the advisee's interests, goals, and reasons for pursuing graduate study. Point out ways in which shared

input is accepted, indeed expected, on the graduate level. Find out when and where the student prefers to be contacted. Be an attentive, receptive, undistracted listener. Rather than waiting for a paperwork deadline on your part or a problem on the student's part over which to meet, make the first meeting as student-centered and relaxed as possible. A positive beginning sets a basis for trust. If the student does encounter a problem at some point, he or she will be more likely to seek your advice.

After the initial meeting, be consistent in maintaining communication. Get in touch at least once or twice a semester in the beginning; oftener after the start of the more intensive thesis or dissertation phase. Formal meetings in person may not be necessary. A friendly how's-your-coursework-going phone call doesn't take much time and will go a long way toward maintaining pathways of communication. Conversations may be short at first. The important thing is to establish a nurturing groundwork of trust, concern, and support.

In addition to maintaining contact with students, make it easy for students to get in touch with you. Keep office hours that coincide with times that students are available. Be sure your advisees have your office and home telephone numbers. If you do not wish to give out your home number, you may wish to have your office phone calls transferred to your home number or install an answering machine in your office that can be accessed from home for messages.

When students do contact you for advice, be open to what they have to say. The right to hold an idea or opinion can be accepted without agreeing with the premise upon which it is based. Challenge

without intimidating. Affirm successes. Point out possibilities and opportunities of which the student may not be aware. Hold up a symbolic mirror to students to help them clarify their own thoughts and ideas by seeing them more clearly.

Interactive communication carries through into planning programs of coursework. Discuss possible electives and scheduling options. Taking an unnecessary course or missing a deadline based on incorrect information from the advisor will quickly erode the trust you are seeking to build. Be sure information you provide is up to date and involve students in the planning process.

In your role as teacher, be sure to provide informal guidance in areas not usually covered in classes but important to students nonetheless. A few examples are: how to construct a vita, tips for directing coursework efforts toward an eventual thesis or dissertation, time-saving research techniques, preparation of materials for a professional presentation, or the unwritten rules of the job hunting game.

After advisors are comfortable with implementing similar applications of the model that fit their circumstances and are helpful to their students, success of the model can be assessed by qualitative and quantitative evaluations of advisors and students. Results could be compared with control groups whose advisors have not implemented the model. Quantitative data, such as retention rates, student-initiated advisor changes, and exit surveys could also be compared for the two groups.

The Mentoring-Empowered Model of Graduate Student Advisement is an innovative approach that sets a new standard for graduate student

advisement. The resulting comprehensive model for needs-based advisement of the adult student provides direction yet offers enough inherent flexibility to meet the needs of a varied graduate student population. Application of the Mentoring-Empowered Model will provide an opportunity for advisors to fulfill role functions in a communication context which preserves the autonomy, choice, and significant personal involvement in learning that is crucial to the developmental process of adult graduate students.

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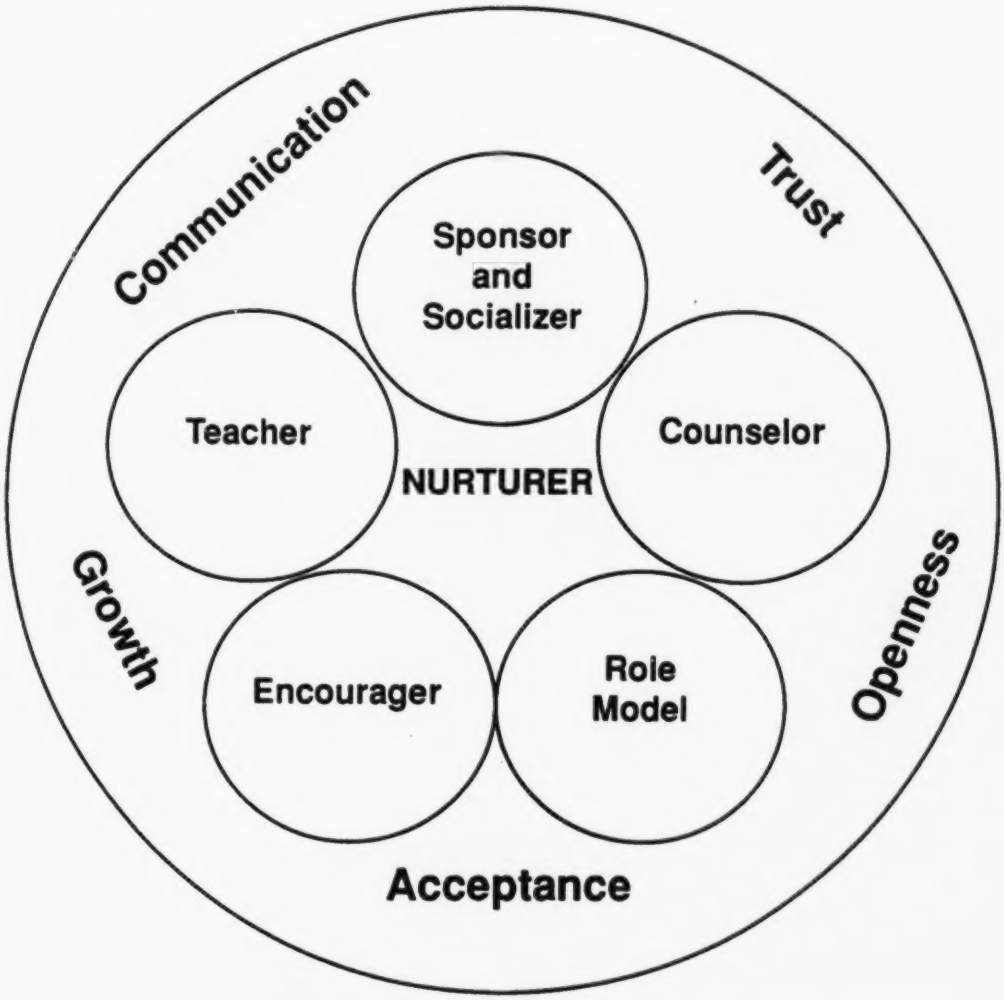

Mentoring-Empowered Model

Figure 1.

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